

As regards characterization, it helps that 'The Curse of Fenric' is a 'growing-up' story for Ace - compare 'The Dalek Invasion of Earth' for the part a spanking might play in that theme. Of course, the disadvantage is that I might paint myself into a corner for including spankings in later stories (which should arguably include 'Ghost Light', since 'Fenric' was originally intended as the first of the season and the reference to Gabriel Chase is obviously setting something up for the future rather than referring back to the events of the previous story.) One change I'll make is to put Ace in a dress, not a divided skirt, for reasons you can guess.

Let's start by thinking what a spanking might mean to Ace. That involves thinking about her background. She's obviously emotionally damaged and has a problem relationship with her mother. (We never hear about any father.) Her mother must also have her own problems, since her father was killed when she was a baby. Let's suppose that Ace was never spanked as a child: her 'mum' punished her by just withdrawing love, which is a damaging and alienating thing to do. Spanking is something that happens to other kids Ace knows, not her.

Maybe, as a tearaway, she was spanked at school. (Would this be plausible in the British school system in the 80s?) In any event it's noticeable that in 'Fenric' she shows signs of a much better relationship with her teachers than with her mother. If not, then the Doctor will be the first person ever to spank her. (Even if he's not, I'd say he's almost certainly the first man to do so.)

I think the Doctor has quite a full and complex quasi-parental relationship with Ace. There's a lot of evidence of affection and concern, like building her a new ghetto-blaster in 'Silver Nemesis'. Another part of it would be spanking her when she oversteps the mark, such as with Nitro-9. (One scenario has her blowing up the TARDIS laboratory in an experiment, after which she doesn't sit down for a week.) From Ace's point of view it's better than she got from her mother: it might hurt, but at least she gets affection and contact from the Doctor even when he punishes her.

On to 'Fenric'. In the TARDIS before the start of the story on television, the Doctor presents Ace with a complete set of period clothes for their destination. Ace is recalcitrant. The Doctor insists. It is very important that she does not draw any undue attention by seeming anachronistic. She senses that there are probably reasons beyond this, but he isn't telling her what they are. All he will say is that what he has to do in 1943 is very, very important, and she is to follow his instructions implicitly at all times. Ace sulkily goes off to change into the dress.

On her return, Ace is even more sulky. For one thing she doesn't like the stockings and garter belt. The Doctor tells her that it will be too cold to go around with bare legs. 'Why can't I wear tights?' Because, he patiently explains, they would be out of period. She needs to wear hosiery with back-seams. Ace reluctantly concedes defeat. 'But, Professor, I am *not* wearing these!' She hands him a pair of thick woollen knickers. The Doctor accepts the point. Nobody will be seeing *that* much of Ace.

The point of all this is that Ace's behavior in the story is plenty

anachronistic and she does draw attention to herself. She talks about doing Computer Studies at school, she reacts to Millington with 1980s values and has to be restrained by the Doctor, and she even implies that Kathleen might not be married. Fortunately the 1943 characters just shrug it off or make sense of it in their own terms, but it all moves Ace closer to the moment of reckoning.

When Ace meets the two evacuees at Maiden's Point, they get into a discussion about spanking. Jean and Phyllis say they'll be in trouble if 'the old witch' finds out they are there. It emerges that in Miss Hardaker's home they are subject to some fearful regime of corporal punishment, maybe the cane on their bare bottoms. When Ace tells them her 'uncle' spansks her across his knee, they are in equal parts derisive and envious. Ace is a 'baby doll' to have such a soft punishment, and yet they would prefer it themselves - especially from a man. (This ties in with the story's concern with emergent female sexuality, of course.)

The discussion has its effect on both Ace and the girls. When they are scolded by Miss Hardaker for going to Maiden's Point against her express orders, she tells them to wait while she fetches the cane. But the girls have come to question the inevitability of such punishment, and sneak out while she's gone, and back to Maiden's Point...

Ace, meanwhile, is thinking similar thoughts about spanking, but less defiant and more confused. The crunch point is approaching when they are in the crypt looking for the flask. The Doctor has told Ace to keep her eyes open for anything medieval, but when she finds the flask she just puts it in her bag and doesn't tell him. Let's suppose that she intends to use it for a Nitro-9 container and so doesn't connect it with what they're looking for. (This is probably true anyway: it is a pretty huge oversight.) Next, she uses the Nitro-9 she's carrying to blast their way out of the crypt, prompting the Doctor to say, 'I'll talk to you later.' In my version what he means by this is 'I'm going to spank you later.' The explosives, and the shiny canisters too, are yet another anachronism Ace has introduced. When she produces the flask and tries to get the top off (which would let Fenric out, of course), she only makes matters worse for herself.

So, they are out of the tunnel, the doors are barred, and the crisis is at an ebb point. Let's defer the scene where Ace reads Kathleen's telegram and instead have the Doctor march her off to some private place, where he gives her a stern lecture on obeying orders, and puts her across his knee. Up comes her skirt, revealing thighs, stocking tops, and finally her pale blue bikini panties - another anachronism which Ace herself now regrets. After all, those thick woollen knickers would have given her much better protection against the spanking she now receives, with the Doctor smacking harder than usual because he's still angry over the business with the flask. Her inattention over that was very foolish and resulted in a dangerous situation which he only just averted.

It doesn't end there because Ace has some sense of injustice on this occasion, and after her conversation with Jean and Phyllis she is more inclined to question her punishments anyway. If only she knew the reason for the Doctor's instructions, she might do a bit better at obeying them.

This leads on to the 'Tell me' argument as seen on TV. The spanking also gives added point to the line 'I'm not a little girl, Professor' at the end of the scene.